

Fowl Feathered Review



No 239



ISSUE № 239:
DEEP PARASYMPATHETIC
COLLAPSE INTO SAFETY.

About the Assemblage

The FFR is no longer a journal or even a "Necrosign." It's a shared frequency—specifically the sound of a 1988 Mitsubishi Mirage idling in a parking lot at 3:00 AM. We don't curate; we just leave the back door unlocked. We are a collection of "important locals"—those who are durable because we are too tired to be fragile. If the work feels like it's trying to be "Art," we will likely use it to level a wobbly table.

The Staff (The Custodians of the Sink)

- Virgil Kay: Still the Final Arbiter, currently preoccupied with the aerodynamics of a falling bagel.
- Silent Bill: Promoted to *Chief of Tactical Non-Sequiturs*. He handles the "Necessary

Pauses" by simply walking out of the room mid-sentence.

- Unkie Bob: Now specializing in *Casual Entropy*. He doesn't sabotage the structure anymore; he just forgets to tighten the bolts.
- The Unnamed Dishwasher: (Not on the masthead). He just crashed in. He's wearing a windbreaker. He's currently scrubbing a scorched pot with the intensity of a man performing heart surgery. Don't look at him. He's the soul of the operation now.

THE PERPETUAL PENDING PLEDGE:

The Review is not for sale; it is freely given. All incoming funds are Sacramental Offerings consecrated not for service rendered, but to sustain the metabolically necessary Obsession8888. Our official registry is no longer numeric; it is an unassailable frequency defined as $Vi \cdot \infty \cdot 432\text{Hz}$.

SUBMISSION PROTOCOL (CASUAL MODE)

1. The Work: Send us 2 to 953 fragments. They can be poems, paintings, or transcriptions of overheard arguments about bowling.

2. The Presentation: No "Cover Letters" listing your awards. We don't care where you went to school; we care if you can stand up after taking a hit. Tell us your favorite type of industrial fastener instead.
3. The Offering: The Perpetual Pending Pledge remains. It's still free. But if you must send something, send a 12-inch sandwich.
 - The Kewpie Clause: If there is no Kewpie Mayonnaise on the sandwich, Virgil will use your manuscript to wipe the counter. Kewpie is the only thing standing between us and the "Absolute Cosmic-Cluck."
4. The Delivery: Drop it off. Or don't. The auction is never over, and we're just waiting for the next honk.

Note: If you hear the sound of dishes clattering in the back, ignore it. It's just the frequency of the house.

🐔 Digital Park and Ride: Send to fowlpoxpress@mail2poet.com

🐔 Physical Park and Ride: 250.50∞ State Street, Bangor, Maine, 04401. *ERRATUM: If the 432Hz frequency sounds more like a rattling heat shield on a compact car, do not adjust your ears. The rattling is the poetry. The 9-volt battery is dead. Long live the 9-volt battery.*

“Non ignora mali, miseris succurrere disco.”
— Virgil, *The Aeneid*





THE KERNING OF THE MIRAGE: A MANIFESTO OF THE DISLOCATED HEN

By Jarkko Penttinen

The fluorescent spill on Ohio Street tasted of burnt sugar and the cuff of his shacket — the same cuff Aunt Libučka had mended with thread the colour of dried bloodroot, back when she still believed thread could hold anything — and the Tree Streets of Bangor sagged behind him like parentheses drawn by a child who'd just learned the word surrender. The Mitsubishi Mirage coughed, not from age but from the same quiet shame that made Libučka hide her mended cuffs under cardigans, and on the passenger seat the Kelsey Excelsior Press sat bolted to plywood that bowed not under weight but under the memory of every unsent letter he'd ever composed — Virgil Kay editor rooster emissary of Fowlpox Press sipped espresso from a thimble because thimbles were the only vessels left after the Great Teacup Bankruptcy of '09, and he did not blink (roosters never blink when the ink's running out) while Chemical Brothers pulsed through the speakers and the Amapiano bassline crawled through the cupholders exactly like the ants that once marched

across Grandfather's map of Moravia eating the borders first — so he clipped the magnifier to the Android burner and the screen glowed with the stubborn light of that two-dollar disco puck from the 7-Eleven strobing the windshield until frost became cathedral glass though the cathedral had no congregation only static and the thermal printer hacked out a receipt-length manifesto because receipts are the last honest documents left in a world of NFTs and blockchain lies, and the photocopier in the back seat hummed like Libučka's voting machine in the Brno town hall the night the results vanished — One Size leaned toward a tray of Caslon and whispered not to Virgil but to the type you will not look like a Word document you will look like pressure and the pressure made the f slam into the l in a ligature that looked exactly like the conspiracy theory his cousin shouted while fixing the tractor in 1987 — only nobody listened then either — he deleted a vowel replaced it with engine noise because vowels are the first things to go when the bank calls and typeset repossession in 8pt and buried it in the margin where all the terrible truths hide and Virgil pecked the kerning with his beak which was holy not because roosters are holy but because correcting spacing in a Mirage parked under a flickering streetlamp felt like prayer —

lowmileszerodownextendedwarrantynocreditchecktax
extralicensetitlefeesdisclaimerdisclaimerdisclaimer
printed backward then upside down then faint so the
reader must squint must work must feel the 1883
compositor's gaslight on their own knuckles and Virgil
screamed about the price of paper because paper costs
more than guilt these days and the Mirage interior froze
coffee mid-pour bassline paused in mid-wub and the
frost on the windshield held its breath — blood on the
Bangor lots peace frog piece frog
bloodfrogdripsteepedreams and One Size flicked the
disco puck once the way you flick a dead fly off a
windowsill and the Chemical Brothers roared again and
the thermal printer spat a QR code that opened onto
pure static which was really just the silence between his
parents' arguments recorded on a cassette tape he'd
found under the car seat — he stared at the sheep until
they posed as Rodin thinkers because Rodin never had
to worry about kerning and the sheep blinked and he cut
the silence and you sheep still sipping this brew fine
print says you're screwed bah blood on the page — the
collaged saints AI-poultry Bangor zoning notices
Victorian press engravings layered in a PDF at 600dpi
because resolution is the only righteousness left and he
zoomed into the ebook proof and the pixel halos glared

like unpaid debts which were really just halos seen from the wrong angle and the banquet table unfolded across the spread guests chewing zero-down air hubcaps heckling buy me I'm not jolly unless you're bankrupt and the margin notes curled like wood type but were only vectors pretending to bruise the page the way his father's apologies had pretended to bruise his childhood — he spilled coffee on the dash called it patina because patina is just shame that's aged well and the Peecho pod hummed the copier lid slammed like a period at the end of a sentence nobody wanted to finish and Virgil's thimble was empty and he said offset is confession letterpress is bruise digital is rumour and the Android screen glared in the yellow rims of One Size's glasses and he leaned closer magnifier hovering wrestling kerning like two cats in a feed store that's been closed since the drought — the zine's name came to him The Dislocated Hen & The Mirage of Type field manual for kerning in a subcompact prayer book for thermal printers rebuke to smooth margins drafted in automatism on receipt paper cut-up zoning notices Joyce-portmanteau bloodfrogdrip Fluxus scores in the stillness between wubs Chemical pulse under the disclaimer disco glare proofing the halo Virgil's peck on the em space sheep berating in 8pt small caps — the

reader drowns in chaos then surfaces into recognition
tears out page three makes it the cover rotates the PDF
180° reads it in the Mirage engine off listens to the
silence that isn't silence at all but the roar of all the
unsaid words and the narrative declares itself feeble
anti-art then repossesses itself — drip — static —
Virgil crows once — the ordinary world was already
miraculous — the Sauce only taught the ear to hear it.

Quarterly Meeting



Quarterly Meeting in Rain Season

– Assisted Liquidity Event

By Mordechai Saint Dennis

The doula walked east along Hastings through the wet neon bruise of morning, rain coming down in that steady coastal sheet that never quite committed to storm yet never stopped either, sidewalk glossed with oil rainbows and flattened cigarette filters, the sour ammoniac tang of urine rising from alley mouths where cardboard tents sagged under water weight, shopping carts chained to poles like exhausted animals, needles glittering in gutter seams between leaves and foil scraps, a man shouting at nobody while another man slept upright against a concrete planter with his mouth open to the rain, pigeons hopping sideways around a smear that might have been food or might not, siren doppler passing without urgency because urgency had become background noise here, and she moved through it with the calm center of someone carrying a private climate, cardigan buttoned, canvas tote bumping against her hip, aloe leaves poking from the top like green tongues of reassurance, miniature fountains wrapped in towels inside, thermos clinking softly, her sensible shoes stepping carefully between hazards, not avoiding the place but passing through it like light through smoke,

and for a moment — only a moment — the whole corridor of human fatigue seemed to part around her, not literally, just perceptually, as if care itself generated a thin corridor of permission.

She entered the office tower lobby where wet umbrellas leaned in a plastic bin and the smell shifted instantly from street rot to lemon cleaner and carpet glue, elevator chime polite as apology, school speakers already murmuring midrange instructions that flattened language into compliance, “Welcome. Please proceed to the designated area,” and upstairs the fountain gurgled faintly through HVAC ducts like a hidden spring in drywall.

The brothers were already there.

Elias — the older, the bassist, the one with the weather systems in his skull — adjusting cables near the Casio keyboard on a folding chair, hair shot through with gray though he wasn’t old enough for that yet, beard trimmed unevenly where concentration had faltered, eyes scanning corners the way he’d learned as a child scanning for their mother’s mood before entering rooms, ritual language sometimes surfacing in his thoughts because ritual had rules and rules had mercy compared to domestic unpredictability, Event: pluck until harmonic reveals truth, drip silence if bankrupt,

and the fluorescent office light hummed at exactly the frequency that used to trigger hallucination edges until medication dulled them into distant murmurs.

Jonah — younger, polite, quiet singer — stood beside the fountain in Friday casual, pleated slacks, orthopedic shoes with careful Velcro symmetry, thick combed hair pulled across scalp like a bridge nobody trusted but everyone pretended was fine, smiling the mild customer-service smile that had carried him through childhood dinners where affection arrived rationed if at all, mother behind cigarette smoke and crossword puzzles, instructions instead of tenderness, don't embarrass me, don't talk back, eat what's on your plate, and now she lay in palliative three provinces away with machines breathing for her, nurses speaking softly with laminated empathy, the knowledge pressing behind Jonah's ribs like an unopened letter.

Quarterly Meeting began without announcement because announcements were constant anyway, Bloomberg fragments leaking from the DJ/VJ rig upstairs — voices promising luxury penthouses, orthopedic solutions, adjustable beds engineered for comfort — “Your comfort is our priority,” looping through the Califone speakers that made everything sound educational, harmonica bending notes into metallic ache, autoharp shimmering fluorescent, Elias's bass humming low drone like electrical infrastructure

beneath a city, guitar in ostrich tuning spreading a pressure field instead of chords, and the fountain amplified through contact mic becoming ocean surf trapped inside accounting software.

Rain streaked the windows in vertical lines like falling stock charts.

Jonah sang softly into the plastic microphone, voice compressed into institutional bandwidth, lyrics drifting about markets opening, milk warming, brothers waiting, mothers unreachable even when seated at the same table, and Elias watched him with a tenderness nobody else saw because tenderness often hides behind distraction, fingers touching harmonics lightly, sacred inside ridiculous, ridiculous inside sacred, jazz signal through commercial chatter.

Projections filled cubicle walls — spreadsheets, training slides, VHS tracking errors, medical diagrams of nerves branching like rivers — while the DJ voice said calmly, “Minor technical adjustments are in progress,” even though nothing changed.

Then Jonah faltered.

Just a pause where breath should have been, shoulders dipping slightly, hand resting on the fountain edge as if verifying water still existed, and Elias saw immediately

— always first to see microfractures — childhood vigilance repurposed into brother vigilance, and from the hallway she entered.

The doula.

Cardigan, long skirt, hair tied back, canvas tote, moving with that same corridor-of-care presence she carried through Hastings moments earlier, setting aloe plants, small cacti, miniature fountains around a folded mat near the central water feature until the corporate office looked briefly like a wellness clinic accidentally installed inside a finance seminar, her voice low and steady as she guided Jonah down, arranging posture with practiced gentleness.

Music reduced to drone.

Single harmonica tone.

Bass harmonic touched lightly.

Fountain louder.

She opened her cardigan, applied the barrier with clinical neutrality, and nursed him — discreet, procedural, almost bureaucratic — nourishment delivered where childhood nourishment had been inconsistent, Jonah's face losing the polite smile for the first time and becoming simply a son, simply a body needing warmth, and Elias felt something shift inside

his chest like furniture moved in a locked room, memories flashing: mother turning away from hugs, mother closing doors, mother saying later that never came, mother now under hospice fluorescents with machines breathing in her place.

PA voice whispered:
“Assistance is available if required.”

Rain hammered harder against glass, Vancouver sky dissolving into gray static, projections slowing to water ripples and downward stock lines, medical diagrams glowing softly, and Elias heard — just for a moment — a clean harmonic inside the noise, spoon ringing ceramic from that halfway house years ago, jazz ridiculous sacred signal cutting through commerce chatter, realization arriving without language that care could arrive late and still count, that nourishment could be improvised, that invented rituals might patch fractures childhood left open.

She finished, covered herself, packed the plants.
Jonah stood again, steadier.

Band surged back — Casio beat snapping loud, bass walking uneven swing, guitar drone roaring, Bloomberg voices stuttering through distortion, “Live

the life you deserve—serve—serve,” meaning dissolving into texture.

Somewhere far away a hospice monitor beeped.

Or maybe it was feedback.

The performance migrated floor to floor like a corporate training exercise, audience following uncertain whether they were employees or witnesses, until finally sound thinned again to fountain alone.

Lights softened.

Band members descended among the audience.

Handshakes.

Gentle shoulder pats.

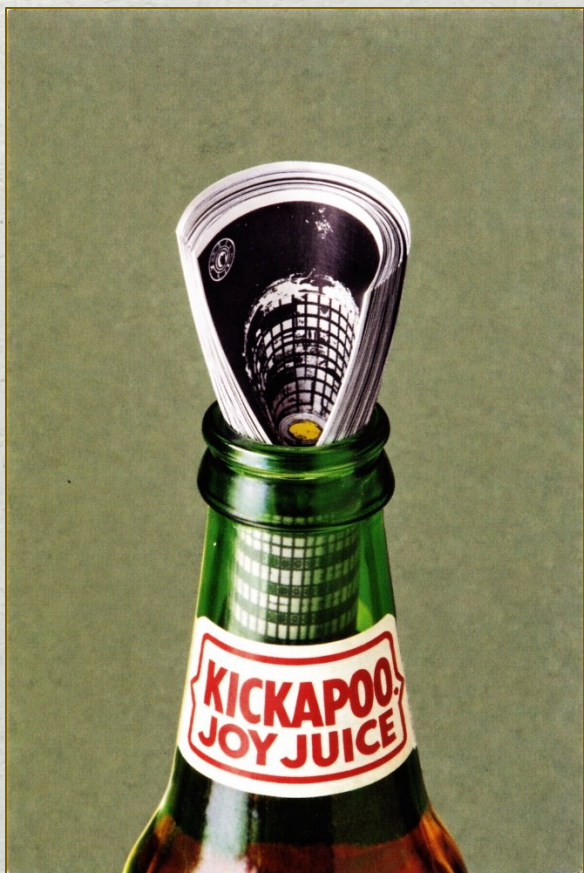
Mild smiles.

“Thank you for your participation.”

Jonah looked into faces with new steadiness, Elias nodding beside him, both carrying the knowledge of a mother dying and a moment of borrowed tenderness inside a rainy office building thousands of miles from her bedside.

Outside, Hastings continued — needles, rain, sirens, bodies moving through fatigue — while inside water circulated endlessly through plastic tubing, a closed

system pretending to be a spring, and for several seconds after everyone left, the speakers hummed with residual current like a held breath finally released.



#13

By Grisham Tabler

In the perpetual dusk that clings to the back kitchen of No. 1 Kitchen like a second skin of soy-scented fog, The One concludes the last ritual plating—General Tso’s gleaming crimson under fluorescent tubes that buzz like trapped insects—and the clock’s hands sever the afternoon at 2:47 with surgical indifference. Apron strings wiped, a single nod to the auntie whose ledger-eyes have already tallied tomorrow’s rice orders, he exits sideways through the aluminum door into February slush that sucks at his boots like the city trying to remember its own name.

Canvas tote low on the shoulder, pregnant with thirteen green-glass Kickapoo Joy Juice bottles—twelve empties harvested from the overflow behind Oh, Grow Up! on Central, where full cases still arrive weekly because the tourists crave the comic-strip promise of

yellow clouds and red stars screaming “Get That Kick!” while locals buy for the caffeine that slices winter’s torpor like a fresh peavey through virgin pine.

He moves through the Tree Streets not as pedestrian but as current: Cedar unspools into Oak into Maple, boots printing momentary hieroglyphs in half-frozen meltwater that mirrors the low waxy sky and the houses inhaling cold—clapboard contracting like ribcages starved for breath, gingerbread trim frosted into filigree resembling the fever-dream lacework of carpenters whose ghosts still hammer in the attics, porches buckling beneath snow as though bearing the cumulative weight of every porch-sitting conversation that ever ended in silence.

At the sepulchral bench on Cedar—plaque worn to illegible Braille by coats, pigeons, and time—he unzips the tote. The zines emerge: thermal-born from One Size’s Vend-O-Vision in the idling Mirage, single sheets

quartered, edges warm as fresh bread, covers a solar-ghost collage of Paul Bunyan's axe kissing chopsticks in impossible heraldry, title stuttering across the surface like corrupted code: *JOY JUICE DISPATCH: Unmarked Recipes from the Kitchen Void*. Each rolled taut as contraband scripture—no crease to wound the ink—then threaded neck-first into the bottles, glass chilling fingertips while the hillbilly cartoons leer with the omniscience of figures who have witnessed every bottle ever drained and every secret ever poured back in.

Caps seated loosely, frictional pacts rather than seals, the bottles clink in conspiratorial undertone as he repacks; dispersal follows its own unmarked liturgy: one balanced on the laundromat windowsill on Oak beside the dryer that eternally hungers for quarters, another pressed into the library's chain-link weave where Zooids convene over peanut-butter missives to debate provenance, a third stationed upright on the three-decker stoop on Maple beneath a porch light that flickers

Morse apologies into the night; fourth insinuated into a delivery van's glovebox on Cypress, two rolled beneath the pocket-park bench where herons sometimes alight like feathered archivists, final pair held for the senior center's communal fridge, cradled beside orphaned whoopie pies—for the elders know joy juice is rarely merely sweet; more often it is the infinitesimal thrust that keeps the loop from stalling.

No one ever counts the thirteenth.

It is not written in the liturgy. It is not mentioned in any zine. Even One Size will only ever say there are twelve. It rides at the absolute bottom of the tote, under crumpled wax paper and a single mismatched rubber glove, so far down that even The One almost forgets it is there.

He does not leave it for anyone. He does not tuck it somewhere someone will find it. He leans it upright against the rotten concrete

abutment of the railroad trestle, half buried in slush, out of sight of every path and every eye. He does not pause. He does not say a word. If you asked him an hour later, he would tell you with complete and total honesty that he left twelve bottles.

Three hours later, long after the boy on Cedar has found his, long after the librarian has moved the one from the fence into her desk drawer, long after the auditor will find the one tucked under the wiper blade of his sedan, Leroy arrives.

Some call him Leroy the Wanderer. Most people do not call him anything at all. He has walked the exact same seven-mile loop of the Tree Streets every single day for thirty-one years. He walks slower than the snow falls. He never makes eye contact. He is the only person in the entire Midnight Grid who has never nodded at anyone.

He knows the bottle will be there. It is always there. He brushes the slush off the glass. He has never opened one. He has never read a zine. Once in 2019 a kid stopped him and asked what was inside. Leroy thought for twelve seconds and said, "Dead letters". That is the only thing he has ever said about it to anyone.

He walks out onto the trestle, the one the city forgot to condemn and forgot to tear down. He stops halfway out, over the black running skin of the Penobscot. He drops the bottle.

It does not break. It sinks. Green glass vanishing into the dark, sliding under the ice, down to the mud where all the lost things go.

This is the most important part of the entire ritual. This is the part that makes all the rest of it real.

If every bottle was found it would just be a game. It would just be street art. It would be

performance. The circuit is only closed when something is permanently, irretrievably, uselessly given away. No reward. No witness. No little jolt of awe for some lucky stranger. Just one bottle, thrown into the river, for nothing.

All religions lie about this part. They tell you the offering is received. It is answered. It does something. The truth is the offering that no one ever gets is the one that holds the whole world up.

Dusk falls in Penobscot-colored veils. Tote now buoyant, The One retraces toward State Street, passing the '88 Mirage crooked on Cypress, quarter-operated Vend-O-Vision pulsing ghostly blue from the dash like a coin-fed reliquary. Inside, One Size bends over galley sheet on \$30 Android, beard spilling across red plaid shacket, yellow-rimmed Ray-Bans refracting sodium into amber scripture. Their gazes cross the fogged glass for a suspended half-second—no gesture, no

syllable—only the mute accord of operators threaded through the same Midnight Grid, where giving is not commerce but the continuation of circulation itself.

On Cedar a boy, fingers foraging coat-pocket abysses for bus fare, discovers the first bottle standing sentinel against a snow berm, green vitreous body glowing like a submerged lantern. Cap twists. Zine extracted. Streetlight falls across thermal type: “The wok remembers every flame it ever touched, even after the gas is cut.” He pockets the scroll, walks on fractionally lighter, fractionally more awake, faint citrus phantom still adhering to the paper like doctrinal condensation.

Inside the Mirage One Size feeds another quarter—clink—Vend-O-Vision revives in cerulean wash across cracked dash. He speaks to the vacant passenger seat as though addressing the entire unspooling night: “Ordinary world’s already miraculous. We just

tweak the lens one bottle at a time.” Snow continues its slow spiral, each flake a miniature stillness aperture punched through municipal din; bottles migrate, zines await uncorking, apparatus thrums forward—a legend made portable, sanctity nested inside absurdity’s green-glass shell.

Somewhere under the ice, twelve thousand pages of thermal print are slowly dissolving into the mud. The wok remembers every flame. The river remembers every bottle.

And here the three artifacts surface intact, fused yet discrete:

First, the numbered edition manifesto booklet—001/∞—thermal remnants and bottle-label fragments collaged into covers, pages a spiraling codex wherein engine principles knot themselves into narrative sinew: kitchen steam as ordinary anchor, green vessels as fake/real tension objects,

hillbilly grins leaking gentle signals, wok memory and zine ephemerality cohabiting contradiction, dusk pauses as stillness windows, novelty-shop commerce pierced by mythic drops, quarter-fed glow the sacred ridiculousness incarnate.

Second, the one-page quick reference—single recycled sheet, cartographic distillate—remains outside the story proper, a separate artifact carried in the reader's hand:

REBELLION IN THE FRYING PAN

*In the sizzle of the heat, a spark ignites,
Are you the inkling that whispers bold delights?
Dance, little rebel, in courage's embrace,
With every spin of fate, find your place.*

*Subversive dreams in grease-laden skies,
A symphony of flavors where freedom lies.
Bravery rises amidst oil's glow;
Unleash the heart—let your true self flow!*

Third, the engine applied to the full sample—Chocko in the tax booth—unfurls as separate tableau: fluorescent cubicle cathedral stacked with 1040s and cocoa-dusted ledgers, chocolatier facing auditor's gaze across Form 1040 like adversaries at a high-stakes confection duel; chocolate bar centered on desk—wrapper crinkling like vellum from a dead scriptorium, cheap sweetness veiling profound melt; quip leaks philosophy sideways: "Taxes are just the universe balancing the melt," tender absurdity delivered deadpan; contradictions linger unresolved—form's rigidity versus bar's fluidity, deduction's cold arithmetic versus ganache's warm surrender; stillness in the long stare at fine print; signal rising through bureaucratic static; sacred ridiculousness in the mechanic of write-offs applied to truffles; concrete setup in booth hum, symbol in the bar, interaction in the quip, leak in the balance metaphor, recognition in auditor's reluctant half-smile, closure in stamped approval dissolving on the tongue like final

ganache—portable myth of evasion and indulgence, where the ordinary audit blossoms into bittersweet awe's quiet, lasting bloom.





SUBPAR BEAR IN BANGOR

By Marcel Vega

Subpar Bear of Belfast—percussionist of the parking lot, archivist of AM delirium—has motored north to Bangor in search of relief from what the acolytes of Stephen Porges term “dorsal vagal shutdown.”

It is a phrase with the bureaucratic dignity of a subcommittee and the emotional temperature of February asphalt. In plainer American, it means the system has thrown the main breaker.

The Bear lives and works in his car, which is to say he has embraced that most national of architectural styles: the mobile frontier. The republic promised land; he has accepted mileage. The back seat holds bongos; the trunk contains cables like a black-market root system; the dashboard glows with shortwave signals filched from the heavens and filtered

through AM weather reports. He does not sample interference. He debates it.

Yet lately the debate has adjourned without quorum.

In dorsal vagal collapse, one does not storm the barricades; one declines to attend. The nervous system, that stern Federalist, suspends operations. Subpar Bear, once capable of conjuring a folk fugue from static and steering-wheel percussion, now regards the condensation on his windshield as if awaiting an executive order from God.

Bangor receives him with that stoic New England hospitality which consists largely of not interfering. The clinic is lit in bipartisan fluorescence. A receptionist hands him a clipboard that seems longer than the Constitution and far less amendable.

“Describe your symptoms,” she says.

“I appear to have mislaid my spring,” he answers.

This is entered, with admirable neutrality, as “anhedonia.”

It would be tempting to transform him into an allegory for late capitalism, or to denounce the republic for producing a bear with a podcast but no den. But Subpar Bear is neither martyr nor mascot. He is stalled machinery. His collapse is not melodrama; it is physics.

The treatment, as explained in tones of upholstered compassion, involves warmth, rhythm, and something called co-regulation—a term that suggests joint custody of the pulse. He is advised to breathe deliberately. He has, it must be said, been breathing for some time.

And yet.

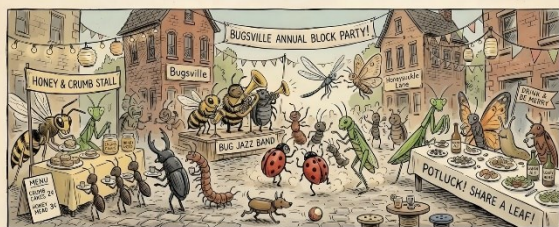
In the waiting room, a letter child drops a toy drumstick. The plastic strikes tile with a report both comic and revolutionary. Subpar Bear's paw answers, once, against his knee. It is not yet composition. It is not yet commerce. It is a beat.

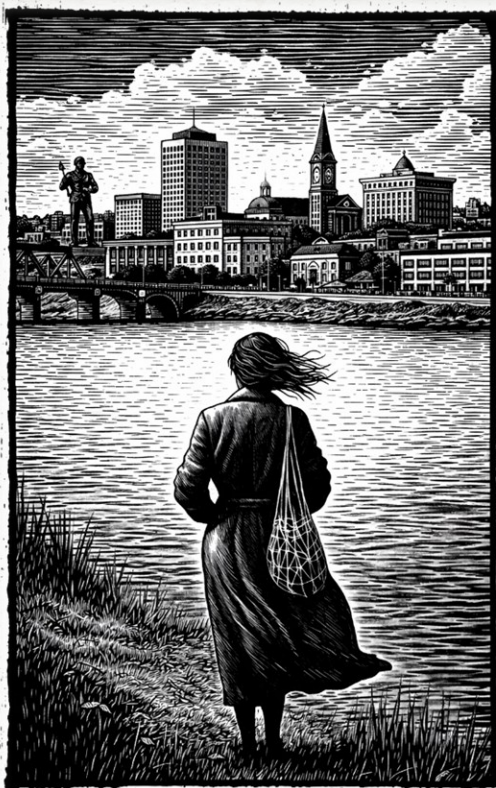
The nervous system, having flirted with secession, reconsiders.

That evening he parks by the river, where Bangor admits—if only in silhouette—that it was once forest. He switches on the shortwave. Static hisses like a Senate filibuster at low tide. He does not conquer it. He listens. After a moment, he rests his paw on the bongo and offers a rhythm so restrained it might pass for civic duty.

Dorsal vagal shutdown, for all its Latinate hauteur, is merely winter declared prematurely by the body's interior governor. Spring, however, is not subject to election. It returns because something taps.

And Subpar Bear—homeless, loop-obsessed,
constitutionally percussive—taps back.





PORTRAIT OF 47-3319

By Richard Cain

In Bangor, where the air still carries the metallic ghost of the old Great Northern Paper Company mill—closed in 2006, 1,200 jobs gone in one quarter—and the Penobscot moves with the slow, acid patience of water that has digested both continent and pension plans, there wanders a woman the city refuses to name properly. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services files her under “chronic unsheltered,” case number 47-3319, but she rejects the noun the way a jammed copier rejects the next form.

She is not a drawer.

She is the paper jam itself.

She carries her possessions in a string bag that smells of burned sugar from the Pine Street Dunkin’s discarded donuts, toner lifted from

the broken Canon at the public library, and the specific shame of being watched by people whose wages have been flat since the last round of “right-sizing.” She does not live on the streets so much as annotate them.

She speaks the industrial pine of the shuttered mills to the brickwork of department stores now leased to national chains at tax-abated rates. She speaks the Penobscot current to storm drains that still remember the Superfund years upstream. When the local bureaucracy strands itself between dialects—a German tourist waving a Downeaster schedule he cannot read because the Amtrak app keeps crashing on prepaid data, a Cambodian merchant on Main Street muttering in Khmer about new parking meters that take only cards and deduct \$2.50 before the hour begins—she is the one they call.

Not out of charity.

Out of cost containment.

Her translations prevent the small civic hemorrhages that bleed a town dry: delayed shipments, bad reviews, a shopkeeper closing early in frustration and shrinking the tax base by degrees too small for outrage but large enough for decay.

She arrives with syntax and demands coffee plus silence.

The coffee comes from West Market Café, where Tony Morelli keeps an informal tab in her name—\$3.87 each time, written off as “community relations” after his rent jumped 19 percent at reassessment. The silence is the real payment. In that held breath the room realigns. Breath, she says, is architecture, and architecture in Bangor is whoever still owns the buildings after the mills left.

In high summer she climbs the concrete steps of the old Federal Building—half-occupied

now by offices of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Section 8 vouchers running six months behind. She does not rush. She ascends as if to a modest altar.

Her voice finds the idle hum of a tired engine, steady and unsentimental. Tourists from Massachusetts call the humidity charming, which is easy when central air waits at \$189 a night. She does not retreat. She scrubs the scorched pots of the municipal spirit with the same intensity the night janitors at Eastern Maine Medical Center use on cafeteria steel—pots burned by cost-cutting that holds wages at \$14.25 an hour.

“Grease,” she will tell you, “is history in liquid form.”

She sings “My Way” in the narrow corridors between brick and glass, not as nostalgia but as infrastructure. The voice ricochets off storefronts whose insurance premiums rose

after the last break-in, off the ears of shopkeepers who quietly maintain her tab because her presence is ballast. Without her the city might drift into total corporate visibility—where even dissent is pre-approved by the Bangor Region Chamber of Commerce and printed on recyclable banners.

They need her the way the night shift at the Irving station needs the woman who buys one lottery ticket at 2 a.m. with coins counted twice. Not for hope. For ritual.

Her manuscripts are written on the backs of housing authority forms—Form HUD-50058, the one that decides whether you eat or sleep indoors this month—under headings she titles Things We Can Try. The ink is whatever ballpoint was chained to the last intake desk. Forgetting is a luxury she was never extended. Her mind is an inventory of fixed stars and falling ratios, a ledger written in chalk that rain edits without apology.

She is the unnamed dishwasher of the civic soul.

She scrubs scorch marks no one else will admit to burning.

Some afternoons she says nothing at all. She stands by the river and listens. The Penobscot does not applaud. It keeps moving.

When she steps back into the hum of traffic and current, string bag swinging like a metronome, the city needs her exactly as much as she needs the coffee, the pause, and the small, defiant miracle of being heard long enough for the tectonic thrum beneath Bangor to shift—slightly, almost imperceptibly—toward something that might pass for mercy at \$3.87 a cup.



WHERE THERE'S MINOS

By Madeline Irwin

In the departures terminal
of a mid-sized republic
a man in a navy suit rehearses benevolence
in the reflection of security glass.

He calls it stewardship.
He calls it growth.
He calls it *right-sizing*.
He calls it *risk*.
He calls it necessary containment
and bills it to the future.

His lanyard is a sponsor's logo.
His boarding pass is priority.
His watch is set to a meeting
that will end on time
because someone else will miss their kid's
pickup
to keep the lights on.

Somewhere below the polished atrium—
beneath terrazzo paid for with abatements,
beneath the plaque listing “partners” in
brushed steel—
there is a room with no signage
where something breathes
into a vent.

Not myth—
just the shape a promise takes
when it is broken carefully,
entered as *operational necessity*,
and hidden with architectural confidence.

Minos is not a tyrant now.
He is a committee.
He is a board vote taken at 4:17 p.m.
He is the phrase *for the long-term health*
said by a mouth that will not be laid off.

Minos is a ribbon-cutting with teeth.
Minos is the press kit.
Minos is the consultant’s slide deck
that calls a community “underutilized”

and means *in the way*.

And he has done this before—
not once,
but as policy.

On a small wind-scoured island
off the coast of a northern state
—Malaga Island—
the breathing belonged to fishermen,
to women boiling salt cod,
to children who knew the tides
better than statutes.

They had names that braided together:
Darling, Grindle, McKenney,
Marks, Mitchell, Eason.
They belonged to no spectacle.
They belonged to weather.

Their ancestor, Benjamin Darling,
came north with freedom still raw in his
mouth,
married across a color line

the republic preferred in pencil.
Built a life out of nets and current.
Left behind descendants
who measured wealth in rope and kin—

the kind of wealth that doesn't show up
in a ledger the mainland respects.

But the republic prefers symmetry.
Prefers brochures without complication.
Prefers a coastline that sells
without the trouble of looking back.

So Minos convened.
Not with a crown—
with minutes.
With letterhead.
With a vote that could be quoted later
as if quotation makes a thing clean.

He called it welfare.
He called it reform.
He called it protection
of the tourist horizon.

In 1911 he named eight unfit
and transported them inland
to the Maine School for the Feeble-Minded,
a name with *feeble* stitched politely into its
purpose—
a word that did its work
like a lock does.

Graves were opened.
Bones relocated
for administrative clarity—
the kind that keeps maps tidy
and consciences unbothered.

There were invoices.
There were contracts.
There was a man paid to make the removal
sound
like a service rendered.

The Minotaur there was not horned.
It was paperwork.
It was the phrase *public good*
applied with pastoral calm

by people who would never be called unfit
by the tools they held.

It stood in the center of the system,
snorting in the dark,
fed by appropriations and polite applause,
by a mainland hunger
to keep its pleasure uncomplicated.

And because we cannot bear to see it,
we hire Daedalus.

We ask him for complexity, for elegance—
for a solution so intricate
blame gets lost trying to find its way out.

He builds us a labyrinth
out of dashboards and acronyms,
out of binders thick with exemptions,
out of “stakeholder engagement”
scheduled in working hours
so the working cannot attend.

Corridors of compliance.

Turnstiles of plausible deniability.
A hotline that never answers
without first asking for a case number.

Daedalus knows the corridors too well.
He knows which walls are load-bearing lies.
He knows where the forms are designed
to make the wrong people quit.

So we lock him inside his own brilliance
and call it a promotion.

Give him a title.
Move his desk farther from the door.
Measure his value in deliverables
until he forgets the shape of air.

Icarus grows up among spreadsheets and
skylights.
He learns early that air is conditional.
He watches his father melt candle stubs
into something that might hold,
something that might pass inspection,
something that might keep them from falling
without admitting they are falling.

They launch at dawn
over the logistics hub,
over subdivisions named after trees
that were removed to make room for them,
over islands emptied
for aesthetic coherence.

For a moment
flight is not ambition.
It is clarity.

The sun is only a metaphor
until it isn't.

The wax loosens
like a non-disclosure agreement
in high heat.
Feathers scatter
like quarterly projections
after the earnings call.

And when he falls
the press release is already drafted—

the template pulled up,
the tragedy pre-formatted
into *regrettable incident*.

We mourn recklessness.
We praise innovation.
We commission a safety review
and pay the same firm
that signed off on the risk model.

We ensure that no one ever again
flies without proper authorization—
which means, in practice,
only certain people will be allowed to try
and only certain deaths
will count as preventable.

A princess in sensible shoes
slips a thread into someone's palm
and whispers
that there is always a way back
if you are willing to name the thing
in the center.

But naming it means
admitting the bargain.

Admitting that where there is Minos
there will be something
built to carry his refusal—
a room without signage,
an island cleared,
a form that makes the answer “no”
look like weather.

Admitting that sometimes the labyrinth
is not mythic stone
but a coastline edited
for the comfort of the mainland.

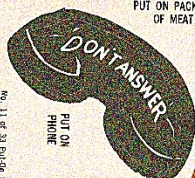
And somewhere, always,
we watch a young man testing the air
with wings he did not design,
believing the sky is neutral,
believing height is freedom,
believing the sun is simply light—

while under the atrium

the breathing continues,
metered and muffled,
steady as HVAC,
paid for by someone whose name
will not appear on the plaque.

CONDEMNED

PUT ON PACKAGE
OF MEAT



No. 11 of 33 Put-On Stickers



PUT ON BOTTLE



PUT ON TV SET

.03¢

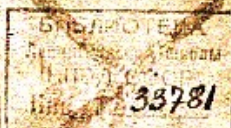
PUT ON EXPENSIVE ITEM

-F.C.G. Prtd. in U.S.A.

Букнаев
Бухар
14 W. North Ave
Chicago Illinois
Bank. 0717

ПРОВЕРКА
1954

Издатель П. В. Анненкова



САВЕТТЕРБУРГЪ

1855

1983



THE BIBLIOGRAPHIC PERIMETER

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